Policing Child Protection: Motivational Postures of Contesting Third Parties

Valerie Braithwaite[1] · **Mary Ivec[1]**

Abstract

Child protection reform has been difficult, despite evidence that practice should be more child-centred, respectful and responsively inclusive of family and communities. An Australian survey of 387 third parties working with statutory child protection authorities revealed widespread support for reform, but significant opposition to child protection authorities. Only police aligned themselves with child protection authorities. Welfare and family workers were most likely to have defiant postures of resistance and disengagement and to criticize child protection authorities for their bureaucratic ritualism, poor accountability, low trustworthiness and social exclusion. Lawyers and special service providers shared some of these criticisms, while health and educational professionals remained neutral. System reform is likely to grind to a halt when essential third parties are adopting oppositional positions. Principle-led communities of practice that are multidisciplinary and community-inclusive may offer the best hope for cutting through reform gridlock and broadening and deepening capabilities.

Keywords Child protection · Police · Welfare · Motivational postures · Trust · Communities of practice

Introduction

When children are not thriving with their birth family in safety and security, liberal democracies have struggled to develop the right policy settings to care for children (Burford et al., 2019; Dingwall et al., 1995; Levine & Levine, 1970). The role is delegated to statutory child protection authorities. Harm may come from a variety of sources. Families may lack resources to care: Their problem may be largely a welfare issue. Families can also be places of abuse and exploitation. Children may be trafficked, sexually assaulted, used to produce pornographic material and coercively controlled to the point of being denied the basic rights of children. Child protection authorities rely on a range of "third parties" in carrying out their work, from welfare

✉ Valerie Braithwaite
Valerie.Braithwaite@anu.edu.au

[1] RegNet School of Regulation and Global Governance, The Australian National University, Canberra, ACT 2601, Australia

🖄 Springer

and health agencies who support and advocate for children and families through to police and courts who investigate and prosecute offenders.

Institutions of justice and welfare collide not only in child protection case work, but also in children's life trajectories. "Cross-over children" is the term used for those whose early lives are defined by state care and whose later lives are defined by the criminal justice system (Sentencing Advisory Council, 2019). Understanding what it is about the child protection system that channels children into rather than diverts children away from the criminal justice system is an important area of research. This paper contributes to scholarship on the justice-welfare interface by examining the relationships of child protection authorities with a range of third parties including police. The article explores the possibility that child protection authorities' alignment with police creates incongruities for other third parties and families, leading to distancing and distrust and under-utilized sources of support for families and children.

Child Protection Dilemma

Both child protection and police respond to incidents that endanger people's lives. They work together on serious cases of abuse and exploitation of children, conducting investigations and forensic analysis to prepare for prosecution and court. Most child protection cases, however, are not of this kind.[1] The most recent Australian statistics show the broad reach of child protection authorities into the lives of families: 1 in 32 children under the age of 18 receive child protection services of some kind; more than 80% of notifications to child protection authorities do not result in a substantiated case of child abuse or neglect; and substantiation of abuse and neglect occurs for 1 in 114 children, most commonly for emotional abuse (55%) or neglect (21%). Substantiation among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children is dramatically different with 1 in 23 children recorded as experiencing abuse or neglect, most commonly emotional abuse (48%) or neglect (31%).

A comparison of the expectations of child protection and police for dealing with emotionally abusive incidents is instructive for appreciating how intrusive child protection systems have become. Police are expected to quieten down disputing adults by appealing to their obligations to obey the law, possibly with warnings of deterrent measures if the dispute continues. When children are involved, the stakes are higher. Child protection authorities are more risk averse and intrusive. Evidence of their intrusiveness lies in the procedures followed: mandatory reporting, investigations and substantiation of abuse or neglect, state-held records on children and their families, restricted access to information and decision-making about the family by experts. Merkel-Holguin et al. (2022) describe these as oppressive structures. The impact deepens when child protection authorities use these same structures to respond to neglect—not only abuse (Lonne et al., 2013), and their focus extends beyond present harm to future harm. When neglect fuels fear of future harm, child protection authorities enter their own "shadowland". Fear of future harm and oppressive structures crowd out welfare decision points: Should child protection strengthen care within the family, or provide care for the child outside the family or both? And how should decisions about interventions be made: Should

---

[1] The following statistics are from https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/child-protection/child-protection-australia-2020-21/contents/summary. Accessed 15 July 2022.

statutory authorities decide collaboratively with those involved in the case, including family, rather than unilaterally?

The way these questions have been answered is political (Parton, 2014; Warner, 2015). In Anglophone democracies, "conservatives" with an individualistic, security and control agenda vie for dominance over "progressives" with a collective, egalitarian and humanitarian agenda, and vice versa. The contest for domination means that governments have failed to develop the optimal security-harmony balance in their child protection institutions (Braithwaite, 2009a; Edwards, 2016). We learn to manage the balance between control and discipline on the one hand and love and empathy on the other in the role of being a parent (Burford et al., 2019), but we have not learnt how to optimize institutional arrangements to deliver both safety and well-being for at-risk children. Histories of the caravan of child protection policies over the decades have been headlined as "the swinging pendulum" or "back to the future" (Tomison, 2001, p. 46, p. 49; also see Parton, 2014; Scott & Swain, 2002). A civilised society needs capacity to act against child slavery, exploitation and cruelty, as well as to strengthen the social bonds of care that affirm children's well-being and identity.

As the pendulum swings, oppressive structures and support structures compete for dominance. Reform advocates currently are railing against a highly technocratic system. Algorithmic regulation for identifying children at risk threatens to embed discriminatory practices against indigenous, immigrant and minority groups (Keddell, 2019). Diagnostic protocols and formalistic legal processes silence and sideline support services, families and children, and consolidate power in the hands of child protection authorities with little public accountability (Braithwaite & Ivec, 2021a, b; Burford et al., 2019; Broadhurst & Mason, 2013; Buckley et al., 2011; Davis, 2019; Featherstone et al., 2018; Hamilton et al., 2020; Holland, 2014; Parton, 2014). Parents who do not comply with directives from the statutory authority place themselves at risk of further monitoring, further demands and possibly child removal (Harris, 2011, 2012; Harris & Gosnell, 2012). Such retaliatory actions are entangled with stigmatisation and punishment of "unworthy" parents and their third-party advocates (Broadhurst & Mason, 2013; Buckley et al., 2011; Davis, 2019; Hamilton et al., 2020; Krumer-Nevo, 2020).

Child protection systems in Australia and overseas have performed poorly under this technocratic model (Australian Institute of Health & Welfare, 2020; Productivity Commission, 2020; Burford et al., 2019; Dettlaff et al., 2020; Parton, 2014). More children are coming into the child protection system, costs are increasing, and processes themselves are generating harm for children, parents, carers and child protection workers (Harris, 2011, 2012; Lonne et al., 2013). As the late Gary Melton (2008) pointed out more than a decade ago, a technocratic approach of categorising care and needs and slotting cases into categories is harmful to children. It objectifies children, fails to appreciate the relationships that are integral to a child's development and ignores "a continuum of supplementary care" which is often "well short of full substitution [of family care]" (p. xii). Melton goes a step further and decries the way in which the Anglophone countries have exported their "bankrupt" child protection systems to other countries, all the while failing to implement the reforms that might be effective in keeping children safe (Melton, 2008, p. xi).

Gridlock in the Child Protection Reform Agenda

Child protection authorities enlist the services of third parties in roles of surveillance, investigation, assessment, treatment, providing advice or advocacy and offering support. The vastness of third-party networks is a function of a fully implemented neoliberal agenda

of contracting out the provision of services through multiple specialty nodes (Harris & Wood, 2008). Practitioners from these nodes have joined with academic researchers to call for a paradigm shift to support rather than punish children and families (see, for example, Featherstone et al., 2018; Krumer-Nevo, 2020; Morley et al., 2022; Morris & Connolly, 2012; Morris & Featherstone, 2010; Parton, 2014).

It would be unfair to suggest that governments have failed to recognise that there is a problem with how child protection systems operate, particularly in relation to the removal of children from their families.[2] Many have delivered national apologies or offered compensation for the harms they inflicted on children through removing them from their families and placing them in residential homes or foster homes where they were subjected to inhumane treatment.[3] Indigenous and black communities have been disproportionately impacted by these policies globally, and their oppression continues (Davis, 2019; Roberts, 2022). There now seems to be widespread recognition that cutting children off from their heritage and from social bonds and relationships that are affirming for them is damaging. Yet, improvements in the system remain beyond reach.

Reform in Australia: 2009–2020 National Framework

Australia's reform agenda has been in step with overseas trends (Lonne et al., 2008). It is grounded in more than 50 government-initiated inquiries into child protection issues over a 20-year period (see Australian Institute of Health & Welfare, 2020; Lonne et al., 2013). The paradigm shift toward a more inclusive and supportive child protective system appeared to be realized in the 2009–2020 National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children (Council of Australian Governments, 2009). The Framework unified policy and priorities for the 6 states and 2 territories with jurisdiction over child protection in Australia. Each state or territory has its own legislation. Although there are differences between jurisdictions, the general approach to child protection work is comparable across jurisdictions, as evidenced by the similarity of recommendations emerging from jurisdictional reviews over the past two decades (Australian Institute of Health & Welfare, 2020; Lonne et al., 2013).

The 2009–2020 National Framework was designed to shift the balance away from a forensic paradigm and toward a public health paradigm in which government delivered support and services to strengthen families and lift well-being for all Australian children (Council of Australian Governments, 2009). The introduction of the Framework was a

---

[2] In Australia, three apologies have been issued: 2008 Apology to the Stolen Generation of Indigenous Australians, who were forcibly removed from their families and their homes (Bringing Them Home Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission Report, Australian Human Rights Commission, 1997); 2009 Apology to the Forgotten Australians, who were children (including child migrants from Britain, Ireland and Malta) brought up in institutional care, many of whom suffered from neglect and were abused physically, emotionally and sexually (Forgotten Australians – A report on Australians who experienced institutional or out-of-home care as children, Australian Senate Community Affairs References Committee, 2004); 2013 Apology to those affected by Forced Adoptions, which was the practice of doctors, nurses, social workers and religious and medical officials taking babies of unmarried mothers, through coercing, drugging or illegally gaining consent of the mothers, and adopting the babies out to married couples (Commonwealth Contribution to Former Forced Adoption Policies and Practices, Australian Senate Community Affairs References Committee, 2012).

[3] Canada has announced compensation for Indigenous children who were abused while in the welfare system. https://www.abc.net.au/news/2022-01-05/canada-indigenous-compensation-billions-reconciliation/100739092. Accessed 15 July 2022.

triumph for those who were working alongside child protection authorities, particularly the welfare and community sectors who had been lobbying for greater involvement in policy and implementation (ARACY, 2008; Babington, 2011). Listening to voices beyond child protection officials, that is, children, parents, families, carers, community workers, professionals and other government officials, was required under the 2009–2020 Framework. Also required was the inclusion of children, parents and families in decision-making. These elements of the Framework challenged the domination and lack of transparency of Australia's child protection authorities through inviting a broader set of eyes to see what was happening in child protection systems and to play a more active role in policy and practice (Lonne et al., 2013).

Reviews of the implementation of the 2009–2020 National Framework revealed some success, but not at the levels expected (Department of Social Services, 2020; Families Australia, 2020). Data collection and coordination improved, and multi-disciplinary networks of practice emerged with training programs in collaborative competence or interprofessional expertise (Coates, 2017; Humphreys et al., 2018; Price-Robertson et al., 2020).

Yet the National Framework failed to spearhead the change that was necessary to counter an increasingly technocratic approach. Child protection authorities were not prepared to share power in policy making, priority setting or decision-making. This was evident at a governance level where child protection authorities were dominant voices in the National Forum and Working Groups for implementation of the 2009–2020 National Framework (Department of Social Services, 2020). Entrenched powerful actors determined how, when and where reform would take place and how the reform budget would be used. At the level of practice, the aspirations of support-oriented third parties that they would be respected for the contribution they could make and have pathways for genuine partnering open to them and to children and families were not realised (Braithwaite & Ivec, 2021a, b).

The sidelining of third parties occurred in spite of evidence supporting the benefits of their direct involvement, along with that of communities, families and children. Many studies have emerged showing that family group conferencing and restorative justice conferencing are practicable and effective ways of making decisions in an inclusive, information-rich and empowering way (Burford & Pennell, 1998; Burford et al., 2019; Pennell et al., 2010; Sen et al., 2018; Williams, 2019). Equally significant has been the body of work that demonstrates the benefits of informal support networks to help families better manage risks to their children and provide for their well-being (Melton & McLeigh, 2020). In spite of this evidence, statutory child protection authorities have resisted changing their way of operating.

Research Question

This article addresses the question of why it has been so difficult for statutory authorities to place their trust in collaborative models that give voice to partnering organisations, third parties, families, parents and children. A number of reasons recur in the child protection literature. Time, stress, institutional inertia, fear, political pressure, public expectations and risk technologies all contribute no doubt to statutory authorities hunkering down against threats of reform (Featherstone et al., 2018; Lonne et al., 2008; Parton, 2014; Warner, 2015).

This article looks at an additional possible explanation concerning the professional social networks that surround statutory child protection authorities and variation in the

strength of their influence. Specifically, this article asks: Do child protection authorities have any "friendly" third parties who will work with them in the reform process? Or are statutory authorities adopting an apparent "siege mentality" because they are universally poorly regarded by third parties? Or do they have allies such as police who buttress a top-down command and control style of operation that keeps families and third parties in the dark, at a distance, and in many instances, fearful and oppressed?

The paper is organized as follows. First, motivational posturing theory is introduced as a way of taking a deep dive into the tensions that divide essential workers who work alongside statutory child protection authorities. The thesis of this article is that oppositional positions on ways to keep children safe, politically fomented but also institutionally embedded, hold back reform. This is followed by an empirical study of the posturing, beliefs and attitudes of those who were operating outside of statutory authorities, but who were essential to their functioning when reform was introduced. Ideology, quality of relationships, responsibilities and professional aspirations all play a role in who is influenced by whom, and whether reform brings everyone along on the journey. The article identifies police as the professional group most closely aligned with child protection authorities and discusses the implications for cooperation—or lack thereof in child protection systems. The article concludes with insights into how bridges might be built across oppositional voices to progress reform.

Using Motivational Posturing Theory to Unpick Political Gridlock

Motivational postures are signals that individuals or groups send to authority about their preferred social distance from the authority (Braithwaite, 1995, 2009b, 2017). Social distance is a commonly used term in the social sciences since it was popularised by Bogardus (1928) in his work on the comfort zone of people when asked to participate in activities, of ever-increasing closeness, with different racial and ethnic groups. Motivational postures have been used in a variety of contexts such as prisons (Barkworth & Murphy, 2021), hospitals (Smith-Merry et al., 2017), regulating environmental use (Bartel & Barclay, 2011) and policing (McCarthy et al., 2021). In applying Bogardus' work to the child protection context, the question to third parties is how close are you prepared to be to child protection authorities in your working relationship, how willing are you to support and stand by authorities, or is your comfort zone more distant, more wary, and possibly even judgmental?

Social distance is two dimensional, involving liking for the authority and deference to the authority. As social distance increases, defiant postures strengthen due to dislike for the authority, refusal to defer to the authority or both. Five motivational postures have been identified (see Appendix Table 4). Two postures express liking and deference: Commitment captures a belief in the mission of an authority and an obligation to pursue that mission. Capitulation is less concerned with what the authority stands for and more concerned with staying on the right side of authority and doing what authority asks.

Three postures represent defiance of authority. First, resistance is a form of defiance that expresses grievance and unfairness toward an authority and a call for the authority to do better. As such, those with the posture of resistance signal dislike, but they also feel under control of the authority. They show begrudging deference.

The remaining postures of disengagement and gameplaying signal lack of deference. A posture of disengagement signals that the authority and its rules are irrelevant and not worth the time of day. Those with a posture of gameplaying are astute to the rules and how they are being enforced, and compete against the authority to win and assert their freedom.

Motivational posturing applies in theory to any context where one entity exerts power over another, although the prevalence of different postures varies according to how legitimate the power of the other is perceived to be. Government authorities in democratic societies operate most successfully when the public express commitment to the authority's mission and capitulate to the authorities' requests and enforcement policies. These tend to be the dominant postures to government in democratic societies, and allow governments to lead, coordinate and implement policy, particularly in times of change (Braithwaite, 2009b). When support is lost, however, the defiance postures of resistance, disengagement and gameplaying will strengthen, threatening authorities' capacity to gain voluntary cooperation through a change process.

Motivational posturing theory aids our understanding of reform gridlock in the child protection system in three ways. First, we can ascertain whether statutory child protection authorities have sway over essential third parties, as evidenced by the vast majority signalling strong commitment and capitulation, relatively weaker resistance and low disengagement and gameplaying. Second, we can compare the motivational posturing among essential third parties, looking for differences that may explain why reform in the child protection system is in a state of gridlock. Some third parties, such as police, may buttress the current practices of child protection. Others, whose job is to support families and deliver health care, may be more defiant of child protection authorities and be pushing for change. Third, because there are five motivational postures, it may be possible to find nuance in how different entities engage with child protection. In other words, while some postures may divide, other postures may unite and provide stepping stones for future fruitful negotiations for reform.

Motivational postures are composites of values, beliefs, attitudes, habits and norms, expectations and aspirations. Postures inform on visible social distancing: They are the peak of the iceberg. The iceberg hidden below the surface has only begun to be explored. Theory building around motivational postures has identified three possible selves that, when threatened by an authority, trigger postures of different kinds (Braithwaite, 2009a, b, 2017). When authorities assert their power, they rely on a "moral self", a self-confessed "good" self that is in tune with what is legally and morally expected by the authority. This is the self that delivers willingness to comply and follow the rules. But authorities, if they are to win cooperation, also need to be mindful of a "democratic collective self" that can recoil when an authority behaves unfairly or inappropriately, against expectations. The third self is a "status-seeking self" that can be provoked by actions that interfere with freedom. The status-seeking self is particularly likely to trigger defiance when interference fails to offer benefits or is done without sound reasons.

Five concepts that have connections with either the moral, democratic collective or status-seeking selves are included in the empirical study reported: (a) trust and accountability (democratic collective self), (b) ethics of intervention and collective efficacy to make a difference (moral self) and (c) ritualism (status-seeking self). These measures are described in more detail in the method section. They were included to provide deeper insight into the positions that divide essential third parties in the child protection system.

Method

Study Design

The term "third parties" is used broadly to refer to intermediaries contracted to deliver services as well as public organisations working alongside child protection authorities (e.g. housing, police, justice, health, education).

In order to assess third party alignment with child protection, attitudinal data were collected from third parties, not child protection authorities. Child protection authorities are unlikely to admit to keeping partners and third parties at a distance, and are even less likely to articulate biases that lead them to sideline some and listen to others. A methodology that relies on reports of third parties about their relationship with statutory authorities is likely to be the most promising for understanding obstacles to better communication and cooperation in the child protection space. If a third party is signalling to a statutory child protection authority dislike for their policies and reluctance to defer to their processes, one might infer that such an authority will react, not by being open to genuine dialogue and sharing of power, but rather by withdrawal and assertion of power.[4] Third party reporting on the degree of their alignment with statutory authorities should give some indication of who is "in favour" and who is "on the outer" with statutory authorities in terms of dialogue and influence.

Third Party Survey Description

This study uses 2011 survey data that were collected in the early days of implementation of the 2009–2020 National Framework to Protect Australia's Children. The survey was designed to capture diverse third-party voices from across Australia as the first steps of reform using the new Framework were taking place.

A web-based survey was completed by 387 participants. The survey was open to those who worked alongside or engaged with statutory child protection authorities on a paid or unpaid basis, either inside or outside government. Participants were invited to express their views on how child protection authorities operated, how they believed child protection authorities should operate and how fairly and reasonably authorities dealt with third parties, families, carers and children. The goal of the survey was to capture as much diversity as possible across the country and across third parties, and to do so outside formal workplaces that might inhibit willingness to respond in an open manner.

Those who worked alongside child protection authorities were contacted through email networks that the researchers were able to access either directly or indirectly through colleagues. As the project gained momentum, snowballing was encouraged, with survey contacts invited to widen the web by forwarding details to those in other relevant networks. In effect, responses were collected from a snowball sample of third parties—people who worked alongside child protection agencies and were part of child protection-related email networks. Given how the sample was collected, there is a bias toward participants who are

---

[4] Research has documented the way in which child protection authorities stigmatise and punish dissident parties, for example, Broadhurst and Mason (2013), Hamilton et al. (2020), Ivec et al. (2012), Krumer-Nevo (2020), and Parton (2014).

signed up or connected in some way to these electronic networks. Further details about the survey and descriptive statistics are available on-line (Ivec et al., 2011).

In order to ensure the sample comprised individuals who had had recent and substantive experience with child protection authorities, screening questions on the nature of contact with child protection authorities were used to exclude 40 participants on grounds of having only distant contact or little contact over the past two years.

The sample of participants came from all 8 Australian states and territories. The majority of the participants were women (79%) and had mandatory reporting obligations (75%). The average number of years that participants worked alongside child protection agencies ranged from less than a year to 43 years, with a mean of 12 years. Ages ranged from 22 to 71 years of age, with a mean age of 44 years. The majority had completed secondary school (82%) and had pursued post-secondary qualifications, with 42% holding or undertaking a bachelor degree. Most were Australian born (80%) with 8% identifying as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. Another language was spoken at home by 13%.

Even though no claims can be made about the representativeness of this sample because of how it was recruited, the sample is diverse. As such, it captures a range of voices with substantive experience of child protection systems across Australia.

Measures

Occupational Identity

Survey participants identified the kind of work they did through ticking which of nine fields of work were relevant to them. They were also given opportunity to write a response if no field matched their work sufficiently well. Participants could tick more than one category. For example, health workers might also identify as third-party special services, and family support workers might also identify as school counsellors. Responses were coded into six variables for analysis: (a) police; (b) lawyers; (c) health professionals (included doctors, nurses, psychologists, counsellors); (d) education professionals (included teachers, school principals, counsellors, child care educators); (e) general welfare and family support workers (included social workers); and (f) special third-party services (included crisis accommodation, family and domestic violence, rape and sexual assault and substance misuse services). Only 30 of the 387 cases could not be coded into any of the six variables. Most of the 30 cases played some role in out-of-home care services, but the nature of the role was often unclear from their open-ended response. Consequently, this field of work was omitted from the analysis.

Motivational Postures

Participants used a five-point Likert rating scale to indicate how strongly they agreed or disagreed with items that were based on the original measures of motivational postures (Braithwaite, 2009b). Of these items, 17 provided psychometrically strong measures of the postures after preliminary analyses (see Appendix Table 4). All scales in this study were formed by adding the ratings that participants gave to the selected items (giving the items unit weights) and dividing the sum by the number of items in the scale.

Commitment was measured by three items: (a) For me there is nothing more important than doing child protection work that respects families and communities but at the same time protects the rights of children; (b) I am committed to ensuring that children and

families access the support they need to prevent harm and promote safety; and (c) I am committed to ensuring that the children I come in contact with in my work are safe and have every chance of developing into healthy and happy adults.

Capitulation was measured by four items: (a) Child protection agencies are supportive as long as we try to do the right thing and learn from our mistakes; (b) The child protection system may not be perfect, but it works well enough for most of us; (c) Child protection authorities are encouraging to people who have difficulty meeting their obligations through no fault of their own; and (d) I think of child protection authorities as looking out for the safety of Australian children.

Resistance was measured by four items: (a) Child protection authorities are more concerned about making their own job easier than making things easier for others; (b) Once child protection authorities have you branded as someone who won't comply, they will never change their mind; (c) It's impossible to satisfy child protection authorities completely; and (d) If you don't cooperate with child protection authorities, they will get tough with you.

Disengagement was measured by two items: (a) If I find out that I am not doing what child protection authorities want, I'm not going to lose any sleep over it; and (b) I don't care if I am not doing the right thing by child protection authorities.

Gameplaying was measured by four items: (a) If child protection authorities get tough with me, I will become uncooperative with them; (b) I do the minimum when it comes to the legal requirements imposed by child protection authorities; (c) I will tick the boxes to please a child protection authority and make the paperwork look good but I will not do anything else to help them; and (d) I do what I am legally required to do to get child protection authorities off my back, but nothing more for them.

The Moral Self: Moral Convictions

Previous work has shown that child protection authorities were seen by third parties as failing to meet the standards expected of them in the 2009–2020 National Framework (Braithwaite & Ivec, 2021a, b). Authorities rely on third parties and partner organisations to have a sense of moral obligation to cooperate with them, often mandated through law or contract. Third parties' assumed sense of moral obligation can be blunted, however, when third parties see conflict between what authorities are doing and what they should be doing under the reforms of the National Framework. For this reason, moral convictions were measured in line with the National Framework's reform ethos of working with families, not against them.

The first measure was the *collective efficacy scale* which represented beliefs that third parties have an important contribution to make in supporting children and their families. In short, outcomes would be better if third parties were involved in supporting families in their dealings with child protection authorities. Participants used a five-point Likert rating scale from "never" to "almost always" to indicate how often the following happened: (a) The involvement of third parties helps families better cope with the process when child protection matters are being negotiated; (b) Third party advocacy for families in child protection matters leads to better outcomes overall; (c) It is important for families when dealing with child protection authorities to have the support of a third party; (d) Third parties can help both child protection workers and families bridge their differences; (e) Third parties have a better understanding of a family's situation than child protection workers;

and (f) Third parties have a greater capacity to effectively intervene than child protection workers.

The second scale represented the ethics of intervention and was called the *punish or persuade scale*. The seven-item scale comprised three items that favoured tough enforcement and four items that favoured education and persuasion: (a) People who harm their children are not going to cooperate with a child protection authority unless they are forced to; (b) It is better for a child protection authority to be a tough enforcer of the legislation, even at the risk of being considered punitive; (c) Without the power to take legal action, families would ignore a child protection practitioner's requests for them to meet parenting expectations; (d) It is best for child protection authorities to obtain compliance through advice and encouragement rather than taking legal action; (e) Child protection authorities who rely on their legal authority are less effective than those who rely on persuasion; (f) Only by understanding a parent's perspective can workers be effective; (g) It is better to try to persuade families to do the right thing voluntarily even at the risk of being considered "soft". Items were rated on a five-point "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree" Likert rating scale. The three tough enforcement items were reverse scored so that high scores indicated preference for a supportive and educational approach to child protection work.

The Democratic Collective Self: the Authority Is Fair and Trustworthy

Child protection authorities have been criticised for how they make decisions without consultation or explanation. This touches on criticisms of child protection authorities as procedurally unfair, if not authoritarian (Parton, 2014). Procedural justice is represented by the *accountability scale*. It touches on all four dimensions of procedural justice—citizen voice, impartiality, respect and treating people as trustworthy (Tyler, 1990). The following items were rated on a five-point Likert rating scale in response to the question: How strongly do you disagree or agree that child protection authorities (a) go to great lengths to consult with the community over changes to their systems; (b) respect the individual's rights as a citizen; (c) accept responsibility when they make a mistake; and (d) are open to reviewing their decisions when challenged.

A *trust scale* was also included to measure more generally the confidence third parties had in the way child protection authorities related to others. Participants rated each of six items on a five-point Likert rating scale: How strongly do you agree or disagree that [the child protection authorities] …. (a) take advantage of people who are vulnerable (reverse scored); (b) fail to deliver on their responsibilities to the community (reverse scored); (c) can be relied on to do what they say they will do; (d) do not mislead people; (e) are open and honest in their dealings with people; and (f) can be trusted to administer child protection laws and rules fairly.

The Status-Seeking Self: the Authority Offers Benefits

The extent to which child protection authorities impose burden and remove freedoms unnecessarily has been a consistent point of criticism (Krumer-Nevo, 2020; Parton, 2014). It is measured in this study with the bureaucratic *ritualism scale*. Participants used a five-point Likert rating scale from "never" to "almost always" to indicate how often they thought the following happened: (a) Child protection authorities use coercive powers to intervene without enough thought as to the next steps; (b) Child protection workers mechanically follow processes and ignore outcomes; (c) Child protection authorities rely

Table 1 Descriptive statistics for scales representing third party social alignment with child protection authorities

Social alignment scales	% above mid-point (3)	Mean	Standard deviation	Alpha coefficient
Motivational postures (range of scores 1–5)				
Commitment	99%	4.56	0.49	0.60
Capitulation	40%	2.90	0.73	0.72
Resistance	50%	3.16	0.78	0.75
Disengagement	16%	2.46	0.80	0.59*
Gameplaying	4%	2.00	0.62	0.77
Moral convictions (range of scores 1–5)				
Collective efficacy	71%	3.61	0.78	0.89
Punish (low) or support (high)	73%	3.45	0.71	0.81
Fair and trustworthy (range of scores 1–5)				
Accountability	14%	2.32	0.76	0.84
Trust	29%	2.66	0.81	0.87
Benefits (lack of) (range of scores 1–5)				
Ritualism	48%	3.13	0.79	0.82

*This is a two-item scale. The correlation is 0.42.

too much on rules for making decisions; and (d) Child protection authorities lose sight of the goal of keeping children safe as they work through their procedures and rules. A high score indicated rejection of benefits from rulishness in the way the child protection system operated.

Results

Cronbach alpha reliability coefficients, means and standard deviations for all 10 indicators of social alignment with child protection authorities are presented in Table 1. All alpha reliability coefficients are satisfactory, most with values in the 0.7 s or 0.8 s. The lower coefficients for the motivational postures of commitment and disengagement are less of a concern because alpha coefficients are sensitive to the number of items in the scale and these two scales have only three and two items, respectively.

The most important finding from Table 1 is the way in which the distribution of postures departs from the pattern expected when an authority has democratic support (Braithwaite, 2009a, b). Commitment followed by capitulation should be the stronger postures, reflecting third parties' endorsement of the role that the authority is playing in society to protect children. Defiance may be a healthy sign that things need to change, but in a well-functioning system, defiance of all kinds should be minority responses.

The second column of Table 1 shows the percent of participants who agreed or strongly agreed with each posture. For commitment, 99% agreed that child protection work to keep children safe and strengthen families was a worthy mission. In spite of this resounding endorsement of purpose, practice was less well regarded. Half of participants expressed resistance to child protection authorities and resistance was more commonly expressed than capitulation.

Table 2 Point biserial correlations of occupational identities with social alignment scales

Social alignment scales	Occupational identities					
	Police	Lawyers	Education	Health	Welfare/family support	Special services
Motivational postures						
Commitment	−0.13*	0.03	−0.06	0.08	0.14*	0.09
Capitulation	0.22***	−0.14**	0.01	0.01	−0.18***	−0.18***
Resistance	−0.17***	0.16**	0.04	−0.07	0.14**	0.15**
Disengagement	−0.14**	−0.01	0.02	0.00	0.18***	−0.02
Gameplaying	−0.01	0.14**	0.09	−0.09	0.06	0.06
Moral convictions						
Collective efficacy	−0.30***	0.07	−0.03	−0.06	0.21***	0.22***
Punishment or support	−0.47***	0.13*	−0.02	0.07	0.22***	0.17***
Fair and trustworthy						
Accountability	0.23***	−0.14**	0.05	−0.02	−0.13*	−0.17***
Trust	0.33***	−0.11*	0.00	0.02	−0.20***	−0.21***
Benefits (lack of)						
Ritualism	−0.18***	0.06	0.04	0.07	0.07	0.12*

*p less than or equal to .05

**p less than or equal to .01

***p less than or equal to .001

Discontent is also revealed in the way in which the mean scores for accountability and trust are below the midpoint of three on the five-point disagree-agree scale and the mean score of ritualism is above the midpoint (see second column, Table 1). Low trust in authorities, poor accountability and bureaucratic ritualism appear to be obstacles for developing good working relationships. Yet third parties were not stepping back from making a contribution and seeking change. An appetite for reform is reflected in the strength of collective efficacy and a strong conviction that support rather than punitiveness toward families is likely to produce better outcomes. Third parties were aligning with the ethos of the National Framework while stepping back from confidence in the statutory authorities as vehicles for delivering these reforms.

Overall, the results indicate that participants believed in child protection work, had strong views about how it might be best done and were disappointed, if not disapproving, of how child protection authorities were operating. But was there diversity in appetite for reform among those with different occupational identities? Were child protection authorities satisfying some while distancing others?

The six occupational identity variables were not mutually exclusive because participants could identify with more than one occupational field. For this reason, point biserial correlation coefficients were calculated between occupational identification (scored 1 = yes or 0 = no) and the social alignment scales (see Table 2). Five findings are of note.

First, the correlations with police are distinctively different from the pattern of correlations with other occupational groups. Police were more aligned with child protection

authorities, expressing greater trust in them, higher capitulation, lower resistance and lower disengagement. They consistently perceived child protection authorities more favourably than others: Police gave child protection higher ratings on accountability and lower ratings on bureaucratic ritualism. In terms of moral convictions, police were less likely to see the added value of third parties as intermediaries with children and families. Police also expressed more punitive and less supportive attitudes to how child protection authorities should deal with families. This explains the negative correlation between police and commitment. The posture of commitment emphasized the importance of providing support for children and their families to provide a safe home. As a group, police were expressing less confidence than others that this was an achievable way of keeping children safe.

Second, a contrasting picture emerged for welfare/family support workers. The pattern of correlations with this group was in the opposite direction. Welfare/family support workers were more likely to express resistance and disengagement and less likely to express capitulation than others. Trust in child protection authorities for this group was lower; they were more likely to perceive child protection authorities as unaccountable, and expressed greater commitment to child protection work, through a conviction that providing support for families was better than punishment. Welfare/family support workers also believed that third parties could play a valuable role as genuine partners to child protection authorities.

Third, special services had a pattern of correlations similar to welfare/family support workers, the main exception being the absence of significant correlations with the postures of commitment and disengagement. Their defiance was around procedural matters rather than the authority's social legitimacy, as was the case with welfare/family support workers. Special services did endorse ritualism, however. These findings may reflect greater institutional separation of special services from child protection authorities. Child protection would constitute only part of the work of special services and possibly statutory authorities have little leverage over them. In contrast, participants who identified as welfare/family support workers are likely to have to work more closely with child protection authorities, possibly being reliant on them for funding.

Fourth, the lawyers in this sample adopted a more adversarial relationship with child protection authorities than other third parties: They had higher scores on the postures of resistance and gameplaying, and lower scores on capitulation. Lawyers were more likely to dispute the accountability of child protection authorities, they did not trust them, and they favoured a philosophy of giving support to families rather than punishing them. It is of note that the sample of lawyers is small ($N=21$) and was more likely to be acting on behalf of families fighting child protection. Child protection authorities in Australia have in-house lawyers who would not identify as third parties and the barristers they contract to prosecute cases for child removal in all likelihood would not self-select for survey completion. For this reason, the results should be treated with caution. Nevertheless, they warrant some consideration because of the rising popularity of advocacy groups that include lawyers who offer legal advice to parents at risk of losing their children in the courts.[5]

Fifth, belonging to the health or education occupational groups was not associated with any of the social alignment measures. Individually those who identified with health or education may hold strong views about child protection. But as a collective, health and education practitioners did not share a cultural work identity that systematically positioned them either in alignment or contestation with child protection authorities.

---

[5] https://www.clcnsw.org.au/importance-early-legal-assistance-child-protection-matters or https://www.fin-vic.org.au/parents/ Accessed 15 July 2022.

Table 3 Mean differences and t-statistics for police and welfare/family support workers on social alignment scales (ranging from 1 to 5 with midpoint of 3)

Social alignment scales	Mean (SD) Police $N=41$	Mean (SD) Welfare/ Family Support $N=179$	t-statistic
Motivational postures			
Commitment	4.38 (0.52)	4.63 (0.42)	−2.85**
Capitulation	3.38 (0.54)	2.76 (0.72)	6.08***
Resistance	2.76 (0.63)	3.27 (0.80)	−4.32***
Disengagement	2.14 (0.57)	2.61 (0.83)	−4.32***
Gameplaying	1.97 (0.56)	2.04 (0.64)	−0.57
Moral convictions			
Collective efficacy	2.91 (0.54)	3.78 (0.75)	−8.52***
Punishment or support	2.47 (0.60)	3.61 (0.62)	−10.58***
Fair and trustworthy			
Accountability	2.82 (0.84)	2.21 (0.74)	4.63***
Trust	3.43 (0.81)	2.49 (0.72)	7.36***
Benefits (lack of)			
Ritualism	2.62 (0.73)	3.26 (0.73)	−5.04***

**p less than or equal to 0.01.

***p less than or equal to 0.001.

Finally, on the basis of these findings, it is useful to ask the question, how big is the difference between police and welfare/family support workers, and does that difference mean that police are sympathetic to child protection authorities while welfare/family support workers are antagonistic? A correlation coefficient informs on relative strengths: It does not indicate which groups are scoring above or below scale midpoints, that is, which groups are critical and which supportive of child protection authorities.

Table 3 addresses this question through comparing the mean scores of police with the mean scores of welfare/family support workers, the groups that contrast most markedly on social alignment from Table 2. Independent *t*-tests provided a check on the statistical significance of the mean differences. This analysis was possible because police comprised a discrete group: Police officers did not identify with any other occupational field. Therefore, they could be meaningfully compared with any other group, in this case welfare/family support workers.

Table 3 confirms that police and welfare/family support workers have significantly different perspectives on all social alignment scales except gameplaying. A comparison of mean scores for the two independent groups shows that for six of the 10 measures in Table 3, police had mean scores on the opposite side of the scale midpoint (3) to welfare/family support workers. Police did not consider child protection authorities ineffectively ritualistic and rulish and they trusted child protection authorities. Welfare/family support workers held opposite views. Welfare/family support workers believed in helping families, while police believed that some form of deterrence was necessary. Welfare/family support workers believed that third parties added value in the child protection system, police thought otherwise. In terms of postures, police capitulated to child protection authority. Welfare/family support workers, in contrast, were resistant.

Police align with child protection authorities and express positive regard for them. Welfare/family support workers distance themselves from child protection authorities and criticize them. It is expected that these attitudes are reciprocated by child protection authorities. An analysis of the qualitative data from this survey confirms these findings (Braithwaite & Ivec, 2021a, b). After decades of public criticism and political backlash, it is reasonable to infer that child protection authorities know where their support lies and take refuge in that support, as opposed to reaching out to critics with an opposing viewpoint.

Discussion

This article uses motivational posturing theory to reveal the alliances and antagonisms of third-party nodes with statutory child protection authorities. Following Shearing (2004), nodes are "locations for distinct forms of knowledge, capacity and resources that are assembled and channelled around particular social problems" (Harris & Wood, 2008, p. 329). Nodes of collaboration and influence are represented in this article through occupational identities. This study has shown nodal differences in the motivational postures for police who are driven by investigation, crime and surveillance, and for welfare/family support workers who are driven to help and advocate for children and their families. These nodes were the most polarised in the sample, not only in terms of postures but also perceptions of benefits and justice and moral convictions. Police were aligned with child protection authorities in terms of how they worked; police trusted child protection authorities and were willing to cooperate with them. In contrast, welfare/family support workers were critical of how child protection authorities operated, how they engaged with families and what was achieved in terms of safeguarding children. Their defiance reached a point where they were more likely to disengage, that is, they did not care too much if they were complying with the authority's expectations or not.

Harris and Wood (2008) point out that nodes in child protection will not only vary in how they define safety and well-being, as is the case with police and welfare/family support workers, but also in how they influence policy and practice. A nodal perspective leads Harris and Wood to conceive of surveillance nodes as the stronger actors in child protection policy and practice, and support and care nodes as weaker actors. The data presented in this article support their argument by virtue of police having the closest alignment with statutory child protection authorities. Strengthening the argument is the difference in the political power of police and welfare/family support workers. Welfare/family support workers were not all qualified social workers. Most held some post-secondary school qualification in human services and most had worn a variety of "hats" in child protection work (including working for statutory authorities). It was a diverse group. Although united in their concern for the welfare of children and families, and in their criticisms of child protection authorities, welfare/family support workers are not as powerful and politically organized as police in influencing government decisions about policies and budgets.

The alignment of police with child protection authorities can be explained in terms of a symbiotic relationship at a governance level and a micro level. As a node, police take pride in their investigative capability and protecting children through their powers to prosecute criminals (Braithwaite & Ivec, 2021a). Their successes in arresting those involved in paedophile rings or human trafficking win public approval through quelling the disquiet and "political outrage" around inaction over child abuse (Parton, 2014; Warner, 2015). High profile success of this kind accrues status to police and justifies their budgetary allocation

for addressing serious crimes against children. To the extent that child protection authorities are close partners with police in uncovering serious crimes, they too accrue status and importance as part of government's agenda of being "tough on crime" against children. The shine of the police's law and order successes rubs off to help child protection shine. The imperative of institutional survival explains why child protection authorities may prioritise their relationship with police, and in so doing, explains why they maintain a command-and-control style of operation that keeps third parties at arm's length.

A story of interdependence also can be told at the day-to-day level of doing police and child protection work. Police accompany child protection workers to assure the safety of all concerned when children are removed from families. Police in Australia also are the most likely to be making mandatory reports about children at risk to child protection authorities (Australian Institute of Health & Welfare, 2020). Most of these cases involve family violence and police are first responders. Police and child protection come together at the micro-level in boundary work: Relationships are formed of mutual trust and understanding, strengthened by the high stakes and distressing character of the work they do together. Crawford and L'Hoiry (2017) discuss social bonding of this kind in relation to ambulance paramedics and police.

In summary, arrests and prosecutions relieve public anxieties about whether government is keeping children safe, and the alignment of police and child protection provides reputational protection for each institution. Furthermore, child protection gains day-to-day protection for their staff from police presence, and police are able to pass on to child protection authorities the family violence cases that do not warrant criminal investigation. The symbiotic relationship between police and child protection strengthens their alignment in protection philosophy, institutional structures and practice.

This in turn is likely to drive distance between child protection authorities and other third parties who are looking for reforms that provide support to families and that de-centre child protection work so that power is shared with families and communities. Reformists are keenly aware that pathways to working cooperatively with child protection and families are lacking and that neither police nor child protection have interest in providing them (Braithwaite & Ivec, 2021a; Parton, 2014; Kremer-Nevo, 2020).

Harris and Wood (2008) argue that a change in governance arrangements is required in child protection to strengthen the weak actors, namely families, their support groups and a range of civil society organisations committed to community capacity building. Rather than a battle between police and welfare/family support workers for dominance in child protection policy and practice, other occupational groups with different posturing profiles may lend weight to doing child protection work differently. Inclusion of all these groups in child protection conversations may moderate differences and encourage constructive dialogue. For instance, nodes of special services that include addictions, family violence, disabilities and housing responded similarly to welfare/family support workers, but were restrained on morally disengaging from statutory authorities. Some in this group would be less "free" of government, possibly even working within government and be able to empathise, at least in some respects, with statutory authorities. Even more neutral, a perspective could be brought to the conversation by groups with roles in health and education, nodes that also would include many government employees. In all likelihood, their relationship with statutory authorities is more perfunctory, following mandatory reporting requirements and providing assessments or services when asked. Institutional arrangements that make health practitioners and educators an integral part of developing action plans to keep children safe may bring benefits of enriched dialogue and deeper understanding of families and children.

Lawyers in this study signalled a more threatening posture to child protection authorities. They saw injustice and were prepared to fight child protection, using the full force of the law to do so. Lawyers may be the vanguard of disruption of the current child protection system through their interventions on behalf of families in courts. If there is to be meaningful reform, child protection arguably needs powerful disruption of the current system on the one hand, and new pathways of child and family inclusive practice on the other.

Models that both disrupt and offer a more inclusive form of child protection practice are slowly gaining traction in Australia. New programs are under way with specialized magistrates and courts that directly engage families facing child removal in dialogue, and developing a plan to keep children safe at home. Children and families are given a stronger voice and third parties are enrolled to provide the resources and support that families need.[6]

Other innovations are being trialled to build a family's capacity to understand the child protection system, their rights and the legal process.[7] Education and skill development is a large part of these initiatives, but resources and support are also offered to families to address parenting issues, including referrals to professional services. The goal is to empower families with the knowledge needed to negotiate a mutually respectful, fair and reasonable agreement to avoid court.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peak bodies have actively pursued self-determination in dealing with child protection matters (SNAICC, 2021). Their goal is to bring procedural justice into a highly discriminatory system and to ensure that children maintain cultural links and connection with country, preferably through placements with extended family. Sharynne Hamilton and her colleagues (Hamilton et al., 2022) have paved the way for next steps along this path with the Ngulluk Koolunga Ngulluk Koort (Our Children Our Heart) project in Western Australia. Hamilton et al. (2022) co-designed with Elders and senior Aboriginal community leaders a set of socially inclusive principles and practices for child protection decision-making that meant the community voice would no longer be subordinate within the child protection system. Hamilton et al. (2022) advocate for a responsive regulatory approach to child protection in which all structures and processes are reviewed through a lens that recognises historical injustice and Indigenous knowledge about how child protection matters might be best addressed. They advance an argument for child protection authorities setting up a "forum to work with Elders 'Birdiya with Birdiya' (boss with boss) on ways to work with the families and communities toward recovery, which are solution-focused and culturally relevant" (p. 9).

In the context of Leeds' restorative city initiative, Crawford and L'Hoiry (2017) observe the benefits of having a safeguarding children's hub for coordinating and prioritising activities, ensuring all voices are heard, and reviewing progress. A regionally organized safeguarding children's hub would make it easier to have child protection practice that is locally responsive and inclusive of families and children, yet these hubs could be connected to each other through communities of practice that collaborate, learn and share knowledge. Locally organized hubs, if sufficiently well resourced and supported, could also facilitate programs for restorative conferencing and family group decision-making that have proven successful overseas (Burford et al., 2019; Pennell et al., 2010).

---

[6] https://www.childrenscourt.vic.gov.au/family-division/marram-ngala-ganbu-koori-family-hearing-day#:~:text=It%20started%20at%20Shepparton%20Children's,culturally%2Dinformed%20decision%2Dmaking. Accessed 15 July 2022; https://www.courts.act.gov.au/magistrates/about-the-courts/areas-in-the-act-magistrates-court/childrens-court/care-and-protection-intensive-list. Accessed 17 July 2022.

[7] Victoria Legal Aid offers a program called Independent Family Advocacy and Support for families involved with child protection but not yet at the stage of going to court. The program provides a voluntary, free and confidential service. https://www.legalaid.vic.gov.au/child-protection. Accessed 15 July 2022.

Limitations

The primary goal of this research was to survey diverse voices among those working alongside child protection authorities and to do so through cross-institutional networks rather than through workplaces. A number of weaknesses flow from this design. Most importantly, no claims can be made about the representativeness of occupational nodes. Some nodes may have been captured by the survey sampling procedure, but others may have been missed completely. In other cases, representativeness within nodes may be wanting. There may also be problems in amalgamating groups that should be represented by separate nodes (e.g. government and non-government workers), particularly in health and education. Future work is needed that focuses on particular occupational nodes and tests with more systematic sampling the hypotheses arising from the findings of this article.

In suggesting this line of inquiry, we are sensitive to the variability that exists within any occupational node and recognise how qualitative research offers insights into how this variability can signal pathways for change (see Crawford & L'Hoiry, 2017 for a recent example). In a study of third parties in one jurisdiction, Hamilton and Braithwaite (2014) arrived to interview staff at an NGO. The staff were reeling in shock because one of their clients, a single mother, had just had her first baby removed from her in hospital immediately after giving birth. NGO staff had believed they had an understanding with the statutory authority that their NGO would support mother and child on leaving hospital. As they expressed what was nothing short of grief at the turn of events, one mentioned that the police officer who had accompanied child protection to remove the child had returned to the hospital. He was concerned about the mother and wanted to check on her. For a brief time, a family support worker and a police officer were united in their grief over what had happened. This story is important in two respects. It is a warning not to stereotype nodes. Second, once we refuse to stereotype, or even think in terms of averages, the door opens to transformational boundary work that can lead to more integrated and effective communities of practice that help children (Crawford & L'Hoiry, 2017).

Conclusion

The important question raised by this research is whether policing has had a disproportionate influence on child protection policy and practice. The answer is more than likely yes, but there are complexities to this story that relate to the dual processes of alignment and distancing. Police provide a node of kinship for child protection authorities: The two institutions cooperate, are interdependent and are similar in their appreciation of security, law and order, surveillance, risk averseness and procedural protocols. Child protection authorities, like police, also are subject to public vilification and political castigation when things go wrong. All in all, they are likely kin. Reform that aims to drive a wedge between them is likely to fail for institutional reasons.

The focus for reform should be less on the "friendship" of these institutions and more on the social distance they have fostered between themselves and communities. It is the exclusivity of police and child protection authorities that alienates other third parties who are critical to effectively carrying out child protection work. Communities of practice and child protection hubs offer opportunity to bring different professional groups together, bring service users and advocacy groups to the table and include children and families in defining problems and planning solutions.

Appendix 1

Table 4

Table 4 A principal components analysis with varimax rotation of 17 items measuring motivational postures

Motivational posture items	Motivational posture factors				
	Factor 1 Gameplaying	Factor 2 Capitulation	Factor 3 Resistance	Factor 4 Commitment	Factor 5 Disengagement
Do what legally required to do, nothing more	**0.75**	−0.12	0.18	−0.08	0.17
Do the minimum on legal requirements	**0.75**	−0.16	0.05	−0.13	0.23
If CPAs get tough, I will become uncooperative	**0.73**	0.03	0.22	−0.12	−0.07
Tick the boxes, not do anything else	**0.61**	−0.05	0.19	−0.16	0.28
CPAs make own job easier	0.52	−0.30	**0.48**	−0.01	−0.08
CPAs are supportive	−0.03	**0.80**	−0.05	0.05	−0.11
System not perfect, but works well enough	0.02	**0.74**	−0.20	−0.13	0.14
CPAs are encouraging	−0.25	**0.66**	−0.21	−0.13	−0.17
CPAs look out for children	−0.25	**0.56**	−0.34	0.22	−0.12
If you don't cooperate, they get tough with you	0.11	−0.23	**0.74**	0.02	0.06
Impossible to satisfy CPAs completely	0.22	−0.04	**0.71**	0.01	0.15
Once CPA branded, never change their mind	0.24	−0.29	**0.71**	0.07	0.02
Nothing more important than child protection work	−0.01	0.06	−0.13	**0.81**	0.04
Committed to children and families to prevent harm	−0.17	−0.16	0.01	**0.73**	−0.07
Committed to ensure children develop	−0.20	0.03	0.25	**0.63**	−0.08
Not going to lose any sleep	0.12	0.00	0.05	−0.04	**0.88**
Don't care if not doing right thing by CPA	0.42	−0.22	0.18	−0.07	**0.62**

Note 1: This analysis accounted for 62% of variance in the item set.

Note 2: Factor loadings in bold indicate items used in scale construction. The item, "CPAs want to make their own job easier", has been as a resistance item in past research. Therefore, in spite of its marginally higher loading on the gameplaying factor, it was retained as a resistance item in this article.

Note 3: Responses to the items with significant factor loadings (in bold) were added and averaged to produce scale scores.

Declarations

References

ARACY (Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth). (2008). *Inverting the pyramid: Enhancing systems for protecting children*. Allen Consulting Group. Melbourne. https://www.aracy.org.au/publicationsresources/command/download_file/id/107/filename/Inverting_the_pyramid_Enhancing_systems_for_protecting_children.pdf

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. (2020). *Child protection Australia 2018–19*. Cat. no. CWS 74. Canberra: AIHW. https://www.aihw.gov.au/getmedia/3a25c195-e30a-4f10-a052-adbfd56d6d45/aihw-cws-74.pdf.aspx?inline=true. Accessed 15 July 2022

Australian Senate Community Affairs References Committee (2004). Forgotten Australians. A report on Australians who experienced institutional or out-of-home care as children. Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra. https://www.aph.gov.au/parliamentary_business/committees/senate/community_affairs/completed_inquiries/2004-07/inst_care/report/index. Accessed 21 August 2022.

Australian Senate Community Affairs References Committee (2012). Commonwealth Contribution to Former Forced Adoption Policies and Practices. Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra. https://www.aph.gov.au/parliamentary_business/committees/senate/community_affairs/completed_inquiries/201013/commcontribformerforcedadoption/report/index. Accessed 21 August 2022

Babington, B. (2011). National framework for protecting Australia's children: Perspectives on progress and challenges. *Family Matters, 89*, 11–20.

Barkworth, J. M., & Murphy, K. (2021). Procedural justice, posturing and defiant action: Exploring prisoner reactions to prison authority. *Justice Quarterly, 38*(3), 537–564.

Bartel, R., & Barclay, E. (2011). Motivational postures and compliance with environmental law in Australian agriculture. *Journal of Rural Studies, 27*(2), 153–170.

Bogardus, E. (1928). *Immigration and race attitudes*. D. C. Heath & Co., Boston, MA.

Braithwaite, V. (1995). Games of engagement: Postures within the regulatory community. *Law and Policy, 17*, 225–255.

Braithwaite, V. (2009a). The value balance model and democratic governance. *Psychological Inquiry, 20*(2–3), 87–97.

Braithwaite, V. (2009b). *Defiance in Taxation and Governance: Resisting and Dismissing Authority in a Democracy*. Cheltenham, UK and Northampton, USA: Edward Elgar.

Braithwaite, V. (2017). Closing the gap between regulation and the community. In P. Drahos (Ed.), *Regulatory Theory: Foundations and Applications* (pp. 25–41). ANU Press.

Braithwaite, V., & Ivec, M. (2021a). National framework for protecting Australia's children: Fixing problems with collective hope? Regulation and Social Capital Working Paper 2, School of Regulation and Global Governance (RegNet), Australian National University. https://www.valeriebraithwaite.com/s/National_Framework_Collective_Hope_Nov1-2021.pdf

Braithwaite, V., & Ivec, M. (2021b). Listening, learning and collaborating through an inclusive national framework for protecting Australia's children. *International Journal on Child Maltreatment: Research, Policy and Practice, 4*, 455–547.

Broadhurst, K., & Mason, C. (2013). Maternal outcasts: Raising the profile of women who are vulnerable to successive, compulsory removals of their children–a plea for preventative action. *Journal of Social Welfare and Family Law, 35*(3), 291–304.

Buckley, H., Carr, N., & Whelan, S. (2011). 'Like walking on eggshells': Service user views and expectations of the child protection system. *Child and Family Social Work, 16*(1), 101–110.

Burford, G., & Pennell, J. (1998). *Family group decision making project: Outcome report* (Vol. I). St. John's: Memorial University, Newfoundland. https://cdn.chass.ncsu.edu/sites/cface.org/documents/fgdm_outcome/Vol1Preliminaries.pdfgaleandjoan

Burford, G., Braithwaite, J., & Braithwaite, V. (2019). *Restorative and responsive human services*. Routledge, London.

Coates, D. (2017). Working with families with parental mental health and/or drug and alcohol issues where there are child protection concerns: Inter-agency collaboration. *Child and Family Social Work, 22*, 1–10.

Council of Australian Governments. (2009). *Protecting children is everyone's business : National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009–2020 : an initiative of the Council of Australian Governments*. Canberra, A.C.T : Dept. of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs. https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/pac_annual_rpt_0.pdf. Accessed 15 July 2022

Crawford, A., & L'Hoiry, X. (2017). Boundary crossing: Networked policing and emergent 'communities of practice' in safeguarding children. *An International Journal of Research and Policy, 27*(6), 636–654.

Davis, M. (2019). *Family is culture, independent review into Aboriginal out-of-home-care in NSW*. Department of Family and Community Services, Sydney. https://www.familyisculture.nsw.gov.au/independentreview/media/independent-review-OOHC

Department of Social Services. (2020). *Evaluation of the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009–2020*. Australian Government. https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/11_2020/evaluation-national-framework-pwc-report-12-july-2020-updated-oct-2020.pdf. Accessed 15 July 2022

Dettlaff, A. J., Weber, K., Pendelton, M., Boyd, R., Bettencourt, B., & Burton, L. (2020). It is not a broken system, it is a system that needs to be broken: The upEND movement to abolish the child welfare system. *Journal of Public Child Welfare, 14*(5), 500–517.

Dingwall, R., Eekelaar, J., & Murray, T. (1995). *The Protection of Children: State Intervention and Family Life* (revised edition). Avebury, Aldershot.

Edwards, F. (2016). Saving children, controlling families: Punishment, redistribution and child protection. *American Sociological Review, 81*(3), 575–595.

Families Australia. (2020). *Beyond 2020: Towards a successor plan for the national framework for protecting Australia's children 2009–2020: A progress report on consultations*. https://familiesaustralia.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/FINAL-Beyond-2020-progress-report-FA-15Nov2019.pdf. Accessed 15 July 2022

Featherstone, B., Gupta, A., Morris, K., & White, S. (2018). *Protecting children: A social model*. Policy Press, Bristol.

Hamilton, S., & Braithwaite, V. (2014). Complex lives, complex needs, complex service systems, Regulatory Institutions Network Occasional Paper 21, Australian National University. https://openresearchrepository.anu.edu.au/bitstream/1885/155691/1/Occasional_Paper21_Hamilton%26Braithwaite.pdf

Hamilton, S., Cleland, D., & Braithwaite, V. (2020). 'Why can't we help protect children too?' Stigma by association among community workers in child protection and its consequences. *Community Development Journal, 55*(3), 452–472.

Hamilton, S., Maslen, S., Farrant, B., Ilich, N., & Michie, C. (2022). "We don't want you to come in and make a decision for us": Traversing cultural authority and responsive regulation in Australian child protection systems. *Australian Journal of Social Issues, 57*(2), 236–251.

Harris, N. (2011). Does responsive regulation offer an alternative? Questioning the role of formalistic assessment in child protection investigations. *British Journal of Social Work, 41*(7), 1383–1403.

Harris, N. (2012). Assessment: When does it help and when does it hinder? Parents' experiences of the assessment process. *Child and Family Social Work, 17*(2), 180–191.

Harris, N., & Gosnell, L. (2012). *From the perspective of parents: Interviews following a child protection investigation*. Regulatory Institutions Network Occasional Paper 21. Canberra: Australian National University. http://regnet.anu.edu.au/research/publications/3094/no-18-perspective-parents-interviews-following-child-protection. Accessed 15 July 2022

Harris, N., & Wood, J. (2008). Governing beyond command and control: A responsive and nodal approach to child protection. In M. Deflem (Ed.), *Surveillance and Governance: Crime Control and Beyond, Sociology of Crime, Law and Deviance* (pp. 327–344). Emerald Group Publishing.

Holland, S. (2014). Trust in the community: Understanding the relationship between formal, semi-formal and informal child safeguarding in a local neighbourhood. *British Journal of Social Work, 44*(2), 384–400.

Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC). (1997). Bringing Them Home. Report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families. HREOC, Sydney. https://humanrights.gov.au/our-work/bringing-them-home-report-1997 Accessed 21 August 2022.

Humphreys, C., Healey, L., Kirkwood, D., & Nicholson, D. (2018). children living with domestic violence: A differential response through multi-agency collaboration. *Australian Social Work, 71*(2), 162–174.

Ivec, M., Braithwaite, V., & Harris, N. (2012). "Resetting the relationship" in indigenous child protection: Public hope and private reality. *Law & Policy, 34*(1), 80–103.

Ivec, M., Braithwaite, V., & Reinhart, M. (2011). *A national survey on perceptions of how child protection authorities work 2010: The Perspective of Third Parties – Preliminary findings*. Regulatory Institutions Network Occasional Paper 16, Australian National University. https://openresearch-repository.anu.edu.au/bitstream/1885/155686/1/ROP16_0.pdf. Accessed 15 July 2022.

Keddell, E. (2019). Algorithmic justice in child protection: Statistical fairness, social justice and the implications for practice. *Social Sciences, 8*(10), 281.

Kremer-Nevo, M. (2020). Radical Hope Poverty-Aware Practice for Social Work. Policy Press, Bristol, UK.

Krumer-Nevo, M. (2020). *Radical hope: Poverty-aware practice for social work*. Bristol Policy Press.

Levine, M., & Levine, A. (1970). *A social history of helping services; Clinic, court, school, and community*. Appleton-Century-Crofts, New York.

Lonne, B., Harries, M., & Lantz, S. (2013). Workforce development: A pathway to reforming child protection systems in Australia. *British Journal of Social Work, 43*(8), 1630–1648.

Lonne, R., Parton, N., Thomson, J., & Harries, M. (2008). *Reforming Child Protection*. Routledge, London.

McCarthy, M., Murphy, K., Sargeant, E., & Williamson, H. (2021). Policing COVID-19 physical distancing measures: Managing defiance and fostering compliance among individuals least likely to comply. *Policing & Society, 31*(5), 601–620.

Melton, G. (2008). Preface. In R. Lonne, N. Parton, J. Thomson, & M. Harries (Eds.), *Reforming Child Protection.* Routledge, London.

Melton, G. B., & McLeigh, J. D. (2020). The nature, logic, and significance of strong communities for children. *International Journal on Child Maltreatment: Research, Policy and Practice, 3*, 125–161.

Merkel-Holguin, L., Drury, I., Gibley-Reed, C., Lara, A., Jihad, M., Grint, K., & Marlowe, K. (2022). Structures of oppression in the U.S. child welfare system: Reflections on administrative barriers to equity. *Societies, 12*, 26.

Morley, C., Clarke, J., Leggatt-Cook, C., & Shkalla, D. (2022). Can a paradigm shift from risk management to critical reflection improve child-inclusive practice? *Societies, 12*, 1. https://doi.org/10.3390/soc12010001

Morris, K., & Connolly, M. (2012). Family decision making in child protection: Challenges in developing a knowledge base for practice. *Child Abuse Review, 21*, 41–52.

Morris, K., & Featherstone, B. (2010). Investing in children, regulating parents, thinking family: A decade of tensions and contradictions. *Social Policy and Society, 9*(4), 557–566.

Parton, N. (2014). *The politics of child protection.* Palgrove MacMillan, Basingstoke, UK.Productivity Commission. (2020). Report on government services 2020. Canberra: Australian Government. https://www.pc.gov.au/research/ongoing/report-on-government-services/2020/community-services/child-protection. Accessed 21 Aug 2022

Pennell, J., Edwards, M., & Burford, G. (2010). Expedited family group engagement and child permanency. *Children and Youth Services Review, 32*, 1012–1019.

Price-Robertson, R., Kirkwood, D., Dean, A., Hall, T., Paterson, N., & Broadley, K. (2020). Working together to keep children and families safe: Strategies for developing collaborative competence. Child Family Community Australia (CFCA), Paper No 53. https://aifs.gov.au/cfca/publications/working-together-keep-children-and-families-safe. Accessed 15 July 2022

Productivity Commission. (2020). Report on government services 2020. Canberra: Australian Government. https://www.pc.gov.au/research/ongoing/report-on-government-services/2020/community-services/child-protection

Roberts, D. (2022). *Torn Apart*. Basic Books, New York.

Scott, D., & Swain, S. (2002). *Confronting cruelty: Historical perspectives on child protection in Australia*. Melbourne University Press, Carlton South.

Sen, R., Morris, K., Burford, G., Featherstone, B., & Webb, C. (2018). 'When you're sitting in the room with two people one of whom… has bashed the hell out of the other': Possibilities and challenges in the use of FGCs and restorative practice following domestic violence. *Children and Youth Services Review, 88*, 441–449.

Sentencing Advisory Council, Victoria (2019).'Crossover Kids': Vulnerable Children in the Youth Justice System Report 1: Children Who Are Known to Child Protection among Sentenced and Diverted Children in the Victorian Children's Court. Sentencing Advisory Council, Melbourne. https://www.sentencingcouncil.vic.gov.au/publications/crossover-kids-vulnerable-children-youth-justice-systemreport-1

Shearing, C. (2004). Thoughts on sovereignty. *Policing and Society, 14*(1), 5–12.

Smith-Merry, J., Walton, M., Healy, J., & Hobbs, C. (2017). Responses by hospital complaints managers to recommendations for systemic reforms by health complaints commissions. *Australian Health Review, 41*(5), 527–532.

SNAICC. (2021). *National Frammework for Protecting Australia's Children 2021–2030: Successor Plan Consultation Report*. SNAICC, Collingwood, Vic.

Tomison, A. M. (2001). A history of child protection: Back to the future. *Family Matters, 60*, 46–57.

Tyler, T. R. (1990). *Why people obey the law*. Yale University Press, New Haven.

Warner, J. (2015). *The emotional politics of social work and child protection*. Policy Press.

Williams, A. (2019). Family support services delivered using a restorative approach: A framework for relationship and strengths-based whole family practice. *Child and Family Social Work, 24*, 555–564.